

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener  
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If you've been longing for a little cover from the summer sun, consider building an arbor and selecting vines to shelter and decorate your garden's covered area. Now is the time to decide on the location of your arbor, as it should be located to take advantage of the best light and soil conditions for the vines you select.

Typically, vines are defined as plants with long, thin flexible stems that continue to grow along the ground or vertically along a support depending upon how the vines are trained. Vines may be deciduous, semi-evergreen, or evergreen. A chosen vine may provide green cover only, or can bear edible fruits or beautiful flowers.

It is important to consider the size and weight of the vine you select. Some vines are light and can be used on a lightweight trellis without causing problems. Others, like wisteria, can become heavy enough to pull down patio structures.

The vine's method of attachment will help you decide on the design of your structure. There are four main types of vines, categorized according to how they attach to their support:

- *Vines with tendrils*: Tendrils are threadlike growths on stems or leaves that reach out and spiral around their supports. Tendrils grow straight until they touch a potential support (sometimes another stem or wire) then contract into a spiral. Vines with tendrils do best with narrow supports that the tendrils can easily spiral around. Examples of vines with tendrils include Crossvine ([bignonia](#)), Passion Vine, and [Vitis](#).
- *Clinging vines*: Clinging vines have special growths along the stem that help them to attach to flat surfaces, like walls. There are several ways that clinging vines attach: some have suction-like disks in their tendrils; others have claws that can hook into irregularities in the supporting surface; and a third type has aerial rootlets along the stem that can cling to virtually anything. These type of holdfasts can be very damaging to surfaces. The location of the arbor should be selected to minimize contact and subsequent damage of patios, homes or other buildings. Trumpet Creeper, Trumpet Vine, Parthenocissus, and Japanese Hydrangea Vine are all considered to be clinging vines.
- *Twining vines*: As new growth emerges, twining vines will spiral around whatever they meet—their planned structure, or other stems of the same plant or other plants nearby. Most twining vines coil too tightly to wrap around trellis posts, so additional support of string or wire will be needed. Examples of twining vines include Clematis, Carolina Jessamine, Jasmine, Chilean Bellflower, Kiwi, Akebia, California Dutchman's Pipe, [Celastrus](#), Morning Glory, Honeysuckle, Chilean Jasmine, and Wisteria.
- *Vines that require tying*: Other vines have none of the above attachment methods. They will require tying to train them to their support. Climbing roses fall into this category.

Once you have selected the type of vine you'll be using, you can design a trellis, arbor, or pergola to support the vine's particular growth habit. Situate the arbor in a location that best suits your selected vine. Many vines do fine in ordinary soil and require only average water. Keep in mind that most vines like an annual feeding in the spring and almost all vines require pruning each year.

Vines are sold in containers; a few deciduous kinds (roses and grapes, for example) are available bare-root. Others can be planted from starts obtained from fellow gardeners. Consult with a reputable nursery or your local WSU Extension Office as to the best time to plant your selected vine.

#### *Popular Vines for Blossoms and Fruit: Wisteria and Grapes*

*Wisteria* is a long-living, twining vine with beautiful flowers that can provide a fragrant canopy for a sturdy trellis. It can grow to be a huge plant. Many a gardener has made the mistake of planting wisteria on the side of their house, or on an attached overhead patio only to find, after a few years, the wisteria is pulling the patio off of the house. Keep this in mind as you select your arbor's location and the weight of the lumber used to build it.

Wisteria adapts well to most soils, but requires good drainage.

*Grape Vines* offer interesting foliage and strong trunks and branches that are great for winter interest. The best asset of grape vines, however, is that they provide edible fruit at your fingertips. As you select the site for your grape arbor, it is important to pick a warm one, preferably with a southern or western exposure. Avoid frosty areas, as new shoot growth in spring is very sensitive to frost. If possible, select a site without exposure to the wind.

Before selecting the varieties of grapes you will grow, you may wish to gather data for at least a year as to the available heat units at your site. Remember, grapes will continue to ripen on the vine only when the temperature averages greater than 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Your local WSU Extension Office can help you select a variety suited to your site.

As opposed to wisteria's flexible soil needs, grapes grow best in fertile, sandy loam. They need a location with good air circulation; grapes do better on a sloped hillside than in a low-lying area where sinking cool air will increase danger of frost and mildew.

Careful consideration of the site and arbor design to suit your selected vines, will allow you to enjoy the fruits of your labor for many summers to come.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.